IN COLLABORATION WITH THE NIIGATA INDUSTRIAL CREATION ORGANIZATION

桜子

SAKURACO

NEW YEAR'S IN NIIGATA

新潟のお正月

SNACK GUIDE | Vol. 23 | 2023 JANUARY

A Heartfelt
Happy New Year to you,

For many in Japan, New Year's is seen as the most significant of holidays. It is a time of renewal, togetherness with one's family, and quiet contemplation for the coming year.

For 2023, we are celebrating the year of the auspicious rabbit. Rabbits are a sign of good fortune, forward momentum, cleverness and self-devotion. As snow falls gently across the prefecture of Niigata, people young and old venture outside to create *yukiusagi*, snow rabbit sculptures; no doubt with thoughts of the prosperous year ahead.

This month, we are immensely proud to have partnered with the Niigata Industrial Creation Organization to bring you sweet and savory snacks only available in this prefecture. Indulge in these culinary delights and become enriched with the customs of Japanese New Year.

Enjoy *New Year's in Niigata.*

Love, The Sakuraco Team

新潟のお正月

Hoshitoge Rice Terraces During Spring.

Rice Terraces and Products

The Hoshitoge Rice Terraces are not only the livelihood for the residents of the Tokamachi area, they are works of art. Each water-filled field reflects the light of the sky above, resembling fish scales glimmering in the sun. The 200 different rice fields create a stunning landscape as the terraces descend like steps on a staircase.

Unsurprisingly, Niigata prefecture is Japan's number one producer of rice, the heart of Japanese cuisine. Niigata's rice products such as sake, senbei, and mochi are nationally renowned for their high quality.

Hegisoba

During the Edo period, Uonuma City in Niigata became the birthplace of their regional specialty hegisoba. Back then, Uonuma was widely known for their beautiful textiles. To bind and stiffen the textiles, textile workers would use ground seaweed. This seaweed was one day applied to soba flour to create hegisoba. The presentation is inspired by bundles of silk threads.

Crested Ibis

While rice terraces are iconic to Niigata's geography, looking to the skies, we see the crested ibis. Known as the *toki* in Japanese, the crested ibis is Niigata's prefectural bird.The bird was once on the brink of extinction due to over hunting, habitat loss, and lack of food. Now, you'll find these birds at the Toki Forest Park in Sado Island. There, they can freely fly, feed, and raise their young.

Crested Ibis in a Rice Field.

Rice Terraces, Niigata Prefecture.

PREFECTURE SPOTLIGHT

Niigata:
The Heart of Japanese Cuisine

During January, when winter's cold bite is felt the most, the residents of Niigata prefecture continue to thrive. Niigata endures some of the heaviest snowfall in all of Japan.The snow contributes to their livelihood, creating fertile land and clear water ready for rice cultivation in the spring. The resilience of the land and people during winter are not the only things that make Niigata shine.

Shikoen store in Niigata.

"A new era has emerged in Japan," thought Tomoe. "People are no longer eating and drinking to merely stay satiated. They are seeking a way of healing through tea." From then on, Tomoe devoted his life to creating high quality tea.

He trekked to Shizuoka prefecture, where he had no connections, with only a small amount of money lent from his best friend back home. He learned the basics of tea production and then purchased tea to start his own business in Niigata.

In the beginning of Tomoe's journey, he traveled the country on trains, bicycles, and motorcycles to sell his tea to specialty shops and restaurants. Gradually, his operation grew in employees, and he was able to gain his first thousand loyal customers.

In current times, Tomoe's legacy and passion for tea live on in his employees. They believe that while bottled tea is convenient and easily accessible, tea should be seen as a way of life and a way to satisfy our souls.

This month, indulge in **Shikoen's Genmai Black Bean Tea**.**(page 19)**

Enjoy Shikoen Tea With Sweet Desserts.

MAKER HIGHLIGHT

Shikoen: *Healing Through Tea*

Seventy six years ago, while returning home tired and jaded from military service, Tomoe Sato noticed a line of people waiting for tea to be served to them. He came to a sudden realization...

Blending tea varieties to produce unique flavors.

MAKER HIGHLIGHT

Sakura Confectionery: *Rebuilding Through Rice*

Niigata is an ideal place for rice cultivation.

It started with a dream. After World War 2, Ai Terao noticed the struggle that local rice farmers in Niigata were facing. The economy was at an all-time low, and they couldn't make enough to sustain themselves and their families. Farmers had no choice but to supplement their income during the frigid winter months, the rice growing off-season.

Rice crackers are produced daily.

Ai had a powerful vision of creating peace of mind for farmers in Niigata, and in 1950 she created Sakura Confectionery. She worked closely with local farmers to craft high-quality rice crackers.

A few years later, Japan experienced an economic boom. This gave Sakura Confectionery the ability to grow and develop in mutual partnership with farmers.

Sweet and Spicy Rice Okaki.

Sakura Confectionery was named after the Japanese flower sakura, or cherry blossom. Sakura bloom not only in spring, but in the hearts of many Japanese people. It's also a symbol of hope for those in Niigata, who long to see the sakura after the arduous, snowy winter.

Now, Sakura Confectionery's craftsmen work tirelessly to bring the flavors of Niigata to a worldwide audience. They strive to preserve the precious traditional taste of their hometown.

Discover the savory taste of **Sakura Confectionery's Hatsune Okaki** in this month's box. (**page 13**)

Sakura Confectionery farmers.

True Heart Chocolate

Chirin Confectionery (Osaka)

The crisp colorful coating on these bite-sized morsels is protecting the melt-in-your-mouth chocolate hidden within. Each package of chocolate contains words of gratitude commonly expressed during the start of a new year.

Common Allergens:	*May Contain Traces Of:*
Milk, Soy	N/A

Vegetarian Friendly:

Yes

Year of the Rabbit

Snow Rabbit Soft Chew

Ishizuka Confectionery (Kyoto)

2023 is the year of the rabbit according to the lunar calendar. This perfectly firm sweet chew is modeled after a *yukiusagi*, or snow rabbit. Snow rabbits are round snow sculptures made to resemble small rabbits with green leaves of evergreen trees for ears and red nuts for eyes. These cute creatures are a quintessential representation of winter.

Common Allergens:	*May Contain Traces Of:*
Milk, Egg	N/A

Vegetarian Friendly:

Yes

Echigohime Strawberry Crepe

Kikuya (Niigata)

Makers at Kikuya in Niigata made this western-style pastry using Niigata strawberries called "*echigohime*", meaning the princesses of Echigo (modern-day Niigata). The strawberry creme is wrapped in a blanket of fluffy cake.

Common Allergens:	*May Contain Traces Of:*
Egg, Milk, Wheat, Soy, Japanese yam	Orange, Walnut, Salmon, Apple, Gelatin, Sesame, Cashew, Almond

Vegetarian Friendly:

Yes

Rabbit Hozui

Ashida Confectionery (Kyoto)

The rabbit is seen as the luckiest sign in the lunar calendar and symbolizes mercy, elegance, and beauty. Here, we see the auspicious rabbit in the form of a sweet *hozui*, or Japanese style marshmallow. This delicate treat is filled with a creamy white bean paste.

Common Allergens:	*May Contain Traces Of:*
Egg	Sesame

Vegetarian Friendly:

Yes

Hatsune Okaki

Sakura Confectionery (Niigata)

Makers at Sakura Confectionery crafted this sweet and spicy rice cracker seasoned with bonito and kelp broth and topped with a sweet soy based sauce. It's then covered with a dusting of coarse soybean flakes.

Common Allergens:

Wheat, Soy

May Contain Traces Of:

Egg, Dairy, Shrimp, Sesame, Squid

Vegetarian Friendly:

No

Hyoroku Mochi

Seika Foods (Kagoshima)

This exquisitely soft and elastic mochi boasts the bold flavors of seaweed, green tea, and white bean paste. Its packaging and name are inspired by "The Tale of Hyoroku's Dreams", a highly acclaimed Japanese story of a man hunting wild mischievous foxes.

Common Allergens:

Soy

May Contain Traces Of:

Dairy

Vegetarian Friendly:

Yes

Niigata Rice

Sakuraco Sake Cup

Diversion (Gifu)

Niigata is a major producer of *sake*, an alcoholic beverage made from fermented rice. The distinct blue and white double circle pattern on the bottom of the cup is strikingly named *jenome*, a snake's eye. This specific design is said to enhance the subtle yellow hues of *sake*. We've partnered with Diversion to bring you this timeless classic.

Dishwasher/Microwave Friendly:

Yes

Niigata Nanban Shrimp Cracker

Echigo Meihan (Niigata)

The nanban shrimp of Niigata are renowned for their red color and shape, which resembles a nanban pepper. These shrimp are caught off the coast of Sado Island, Niigata. From there, the shrimp are made into a paste and carefully kneaded into dough, which is then baked to crisp perfection.

Common Allergens:

Egg, Wheat, Shrimp, Soy

May Contain Traces Of:

Buckwheat, Dairy, Crab

Vegetarian Friendly:

No

DISCOVER JAPAN

Fortune Cookies: *Past and Present*

Tying omikuji to leave behind bad luck.

Though fortune cookies are enjoyed by people all around the world, their humble beginnings remain relatively unknown.

As early as the 1400s, visitors of shrines and temples throughout Japan have been able to set their intentions on a wish and receive an omikuji, or a fortune. These fortunes provide detailed insights not only on if your wish will come true, but on all aspects of life, including love, health, and wealth.

The first shrine visit of the new year, *hatsumode*, presents an opportunity for many to draw *omikuji* and read their fortune for the upcoming year. Traditionally, a good fortune is taken home. Bad fortunes are tied to a tree in hopes that they will not come true.

In 19th century Kyoto, a new way to receive omikuji was created. Tsujiura rice crackers are the precursors to the fortune cookies we know today.

In 1914, a Japanese immigrant named Makoto Hagiwara created the first modern day fortune cookie in San Francisco for the Golden Gate Park Japanese Tea Garden. Word of his delicious cookies spread like wildfire, and the fortune cookie quickly became a worldwide success.

Baking Tsujiura Senbei.

May Good Fortune Find You

Fortune Cookie

Seki Confectionery (Kyoto)

These fortune cookies are slightly sweet and have a warm, comforting taste. Inside these cookies you'll find an *omijuki*, or fortune.

Common Allergens:

Egg, Wheat

Vegetarian Friendly:

Yes

May Contain Traces Of:

Buckwheat, Peanuts, Dairy

What does 2023 have in store for you? Read your fortune on our website using the QR code below.

sakura.co/blog/discover-your-2023-fortune/

Negi Miso Senbei

Kiyonoya (Niigata)

Kiyonoya uses miso from Ojiya, Niigata Prefecture to perfectly compliment Fukaya green onions, or *negi*, for the glaze that coats these fluffy baked rice crackers.

Common Allergens:

Wheat, Soy

May Contain Traces Of:

Egg, Dairy, Shrimp, Crab, Peanuts

Vegetarian Friendly:

Yes

Ajigonomi

Bourbon (Niigata)

These iconic snacks have been sold in Japan since the 1980's. Inside you'll find rice crackers, bite-sized bean treats, and anchovies.

Common Allergens:

Milk, Wheat, Shrimp, Peanuts, Squid, Sesame, Soy

May Contain Traces Of:

Egg, Crab

Vegetarian Friendly:

No

Niigata Specialties

Konjac Yokan

Kanai Foods (Niigata)

Konjac and yokan are quite a rare pair. Craftsmen at Kanai Foods have paired azuki beans with a special konjac flour to create this sumptuous yokan treat. The packaging has cute Japanese depictions of a plum flower, sea bream, and Mt. Fuji.

Common Allergens:

N/A

May Contain Traces Of:

Peanuts, Sesame, Walnut

Vegetarian Friendly:

Yes

Bakauke Sesame Rice Crackers

Kuriyama Beika (Niigata)

These crispy bite-sized fried rice snacks have black sesame seeds with honey soy sauce kneaded into the dough, giving them their sweet and savory flavor.

Common Allergens:

Wheat, Sesame, Soy

May Contain Traces Of:

Shrimp, Crab, Egg, Dairy, Peanuts

Vegetarian Friendly:

Yes

Genmai Black Bean Houjicha

Shikouen (Niigata)

The craftsmen of Shikoen have created their Genmai Black Bean Houjicha with inspiration from the traditional New Year's food *osechi*. Osechi features small side dishes that each represent a different meaning for the new year. Black beans represent strength and health.

Common Allergens:	*May Contain Traces Of:*
Soy	N/A

Vegetarian Friendly:

Yes

Ayumi's Favorite Snacks of 2022

While 2022 was full of delicious snacks from beginning to end, there were a few that stood out as Sakuraco founder Ayumi's favorites. **Find out which one you received by scanning the QR code.**

Afternoon Tea

Matcha Anko Dorayaki

Kimura (Kumamoto)

This dorayaki is characterized by its sweetness, richness, and delicious flavor. The soft, chewy outer layers are the perfect veil for the richly flavored matcha bean paste filling inside.

Common Allergens:	*May Contain Traces Of:*
Egg, Milk, Wheat, Soy, Japanese yam	N/A

Vegetarian Friendly:

Yes

Brown Sugar Karinto

Natsume Confectionery (Aichi)

With over 2000 years of history, karinto is a classic in Japanese snack cuisine. Indulge in the satisfying crunch of karinto infused with a rich brown sugar flavor.

Common Allergens:	*May Contain Traces Of:*
Wheat, Sesame	N/A

Vegetarian Friendly:

Yes

DISCOVER JAPAN

Tokamachi Snow Festival:
The Birthplace of Modern Snow Festivals

Fireworks at the Tokamachi Snow Festival.[1]

The small town of Tokamachi in Niigata prefecture is one of the snowiest towns in the country. 460 inches of snow blankets the town each year. Even with the cold bite of winter, residents in Tokamachi, Niigata have created the perfect way to celebrate the season.

The goal of the Tokamachi Snow Festival is to combat negative sentiments surrounding the astonishing amount of snow they receive. Since 1950, residents young and old venture outside in the depths of winter to create beautiful snow sculptures. Generations of families create these winter wonders from the blank canvases of snow; this practice has earned Tokamachi the title of "the birthplace of the modern day snow festivals."

An Elaborate Snow Castle.

Snow Sculptures Light Up At Night.[2]

Throughout the three-day festival, you'll find *hiroba*, or festival plaza areas. There, you'll find massive, elaborately sculpted structures created for competition. You'll also happen upon snow and ice sculptures made purely to bring joy to festival goers. Some creations are even made by local school children.

As evening approaches, attendees make their way to the main event of the festival, the snow carnival. A breathtakingly huge snow formation serves as a 50-meter long 3-story tall stage. Japanese singers, dancers, and comedians perform on the frozen stage as onlookers sip *amazake*, a warm fermented rice drink. The grand finale is a dazzling display of fireworks beautifully reflecting upon the pure white snow below.

[1]HTTPS://COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/WIKI/FILE:TOKAMACHI_SNOW_FESTIVAL.JPG

[2]HTTPS://SNOWFES.JP/HP/

COMMUNITY

Sakuraco Community

We're looking forward to seeing our lovely community enjoying their boxes!

Take a selfie with your box and share your photos with the hashtag **#sakuraco** and you might be featured in next month's booklet!

Join us **@wearesakuraco**

@ostaffbev

@kutiemoto

@maddie_pastel_

@kumiragdoll_kitchen

@kitty87dina

@potatocalculator

@morefuntolearning

SAKURACO

Photo Contest

The new year is a time of togetherness for those all around the world. For this month's photo contest, take a selfie or group shot showing us how you are ringing in the new year with your Sakuraco box. Then upload it to social media with the hashtags **#sakuraco** and **#sakuracoholiday.**

We'll be picking some of our favorites to win great prizes. Upload your entry by **February 25th, 2023** and you could take home wonderful Japan exclusives.

GRAND PRIZE x2

- Glass Kagami Mochi Set
- Free 3-Month Sakuraco Subscription

RUNNER-UP x5

- Daruma Doll Set
- Free 1-Month Sakuraco Subscription

All winners will be announced on **talk.japanhaul.com.** If you win - make sure to claim your prize via the community forum before **March 15th, 2023** (ask an admin if you need help).

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You can also activate your streak by visiting my.sakura.co/streaks using this code:

NEWYEAR23

Check out your customer portal at my.sakura.co to activate your streaks, see past boxes, and chat with other Sakuraco lovers.

This booklet has been printed in Japan so it's read from right to left.
Flip me over to begin reading from the first page!